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ABSTRACT

Principals have two reasons to wonder about the whole concept of leadership. First, they are responsible for identifying leadership in others; and second, they must be analytical and reflective about their own capabilities. Consequently, there is always demand for valid and reliable measurement of leadership qualities. This issue reviews recent publications that address issues involved in measuring and evaluating leadership. The publications are: (1) "Measurements of Personality and Leadership: Some Relationships" (Frederick C. Wendel, Allan H. Schmidt, and James Loch); (2) "Assessing Leadership and Measuring Its Effects" (Richard L. Hughes, Robert C. Ginnett, and Gordon J. Curphy); (4) "Performance Appraisal and Selection of School Leaders: Selection Processes and Measurement Issues" (Kenneth Leithwood, Paul T. Begley, and J. Bradley Cousins); and (5) "Using Multi-Raters in Superintendent Evaluation" (Richard P. Santeusanio). (LMI)

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Measuring Leadership

Larry Lashway

After yet another day of crisis management or battles with the bureaucracy, many principals must wonder about the whole concept of *leadership*. What they do to get through each day seems far removed from the visions of dynamic, inspirational leadership they once nurtured. In their darkest hours, they may wonder whether they really *are* leaders.

Principals have two reasons to be troubled by these doubts. First, they are responsible for identifying leadership in others, especially when interviewing candidates for administrative or faculty positions. Given today's quickly changing school environment, districts must identify candidates who can act with initiative, raise questions, and take intelligent risks.

Second, as leaders themselves, principals must be analytical and reflective about their own capabilities. Are they leading their schools effectively? What skills need improvement? How should they direct their personal and professional growth?

Because of such questions, there is always a strong market for instruments that promise valid and reliable measurement of leadership qualities. Leadership tests are abundant, but do they deliver on their claims? The fairest answer to that question is "Yes, but...." Measurements of leadership can provide valuable information not available from informal interviews, observations, or intuition. However, users must select assessment procedures wisely, recognizing that no single approach is perfect and that their choices must be tailored to the needs of the school.

The literature on these issues is surprisingly limited, but the works discussed in this issue provide a variety of helpful perspectives.

Frederick C. Wendel and colleagues review some basic concepts of measurement and apply them to leadership testing.

Richard L. Hughes and colleagues discuss some important techniques for measuring leadership qualities and the effects of leadership.

Kenneth Leithwood and colleagues examine the ways that schools measure leadership and provide recommendations for improvement.

Richard P. Santeusanio describes the 360-degree feedback system used in his school district and provides guidelines for using multirater feedback.

Frank Freeman and colleagues provide capsule descriptions of some commonly used leadership tests, and the *ERIC Clearinghouse for Assessment and Evaluation* offers an online database of leadership tests.

Larry Lashway is a research analyst and writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management at the University of Oregon.

Wendel, Frederick C.; Schmidt, Allan H.; and Loch, James. **Measurements of Personality and Leadership: Some Relationships.** Lincoln, Neb., 1992. 121 pages. ED 350 694. *Available from:* ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 7420 Fullerton Rd., Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. 800-443-3742. $20.40 plus postage.

Measuring leadership is an attractive concept that seems to promise precise, scientifically valid "proof" that a person has (or does

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not have) appropriate qualities. Unfortunately, this promise can be misleading, since all measurement instruments have important limitations. In this monograph, Frederick Wendel and colleagues present a comprehensive but highly readable review of measurement concepts.

The authors begin by cautioning that abstract concepts such as personality and leadership are always more than the sum of precisely measured parts. We can, for example, accurately measure characteristics such as weight, height, and hair color, but the concept of beauty still remains in the eye of the beholder.

A crucial point to understand is that every leadership test is based on some definition of leadership, and current tests are based on a wide range of definitions. Some focus on personal traits, such as drive or interpersonal skill. Some zero in on specific behaviors demonstrated by effective leaders. Others call attention to the way that leaders think or use power, and still others assume that leadership varies with situations.

The practical implication is that principals must have a clear understanding of how leadership is defined in their institution. For example, if a school has adopted site-based decision making, an appropriate test will provide feedback on how a leader facilitates the work of others.

The authors provide capsule descriptions of 16 commonly used leadership tests, including information on their validity and reliability. Even more helpful is a discussion of assessment centers, in which participants perform simulations of actual leadership tasks, thus producing "samples" rather than "signs" of leadership. (A paper-and-pencil test may reveal an individual's knowledge of leadership principles but provide no information on his or her ability to carry out leadership tasks in a real-world setting.)

Wendel and colleagues cite studies showing that 90 percent of those scoring at the highest level in the NASSP assessment centers receive similar high ratings in later job performance. Although assessment centers are considerably more expensive than paper-and-pencil tests, they may be cost-effective, especially for entry-level candidates with no track record.

The authors concede that measuring leadership is still an inexact science requiring careful reflection and caution, yet the right test, "one that fits the purpose of the examiner, if administered properly, if scored with exactitude, and if interpreted correctly, will yield good results." Conversely, those who rely on intuition or unsystematic procedures are taking major risks.

Hughes, Richard L.; Ginnett, Robert C.; and Curphy, Gordon J. **"Assessing Leadership and Measuring Its Effects."** In *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience*. Homewood, Ill.: Irwin, 1993. 543 pages. ED 363 927. *Available from:* Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1333 Burridge Parkway, Burridge, IL 60521. 630-789-4000. $42.95.

In this chapter of a leadership textbook, the authors summarize the various ways that leadership qualities can be assessed and also discuss ways of measuring leadership effects.

The *critical-incidents* technique asks subordinates, peers, or superiors to describe an incident in which the leader did a particularly good or bad job. This method typically generates context-rich descriptions of the situation, the leader's behaviors, and the impact of the leader's actions on others. However, this technique requires considerable time, effort, and expense. In addition, incidents may differ dramatically, making it difficult to compare leaders by the same standard. The critical-incidents approach may be better suited for individual professional development rather than for selecting leaders.

The *interview* is a more familiar tool for assessing leadership skill. Structured interviews, in which leaders are asked a predetermined set of questions, are generally preferable to informal, unstructured interviews, since a common set of questions makes comparisons much easier.

Observation is another common technique that can be structured (with a predetermined set of categories) or unstructured (with observers simply recording anything that happens). Observations can yield excellent information about how leaders actually behave, but systematically observing and recording on-the-job behavior is both difficult and time-consuming.

Two other types of assessment are the familiar *paper-and-pencil* measures (such as surveys and questionnaires) and the *assessment center*, which challenges examinees with a series of interviews and realistic leadership tasks, using trained assessors to rate their performance.

While these methods will generate information on the qualities and skills that leaders possess, it is also possible to assess the *effects* of leadership. Here, the key issue is identifying the criteria by which performance is to be judged; that is, what will we accept as evidence that the leader is successful? One common answer is that successful leaders are those whose unit performs well. (An obvious example, in regard to a school leader, would be test scores).

The problem with such criteria is that they may be affected by factors other than the leader's skills. For example, test scores may be influenced far more by student background than by the principal's leadership skills. The authors recommend the use of multiple criteria, with emphasis on those most responsive to leader actions.

Leithwood, Kenneth; Begley, Paul T.; and Cousins, J. Bradley. **"Performance Appraisal and Selection of School Leaders: Selection Processes and Measurement Issues."** In *Developing Expert Leadership for Future Schools*. London: Falmer Press, 1994. 331 pages. ED 394 172. *Available from:* Falmer Press, Taylor & Francis, Inc., 1900 Frost Road, Suite 101, Bristol, PA 19007. 215-785-5800. $27 paperback.

This selection reviews the ways that schools measure leadership and provides guidelines for improving selection, appraisal, and professional development.

Leithwood and his colleagues note that the literature on leader selection is surprisingly thin, considering the consequences of making a poor choice. Many selection processes are unsystematic, relying more on subjective perceptions than hard evidence. The interview appears to be the most commonly used tool, with standardized instruments infrequently used. The predictive power of such methods is questionable.

However, after examining 14 formal instruments designed to measure school leadership, the authors identified a number of potential problems. First, some of the instruments based their questions on observation of *typical* rather than *expert* leaders. The fact that many leaders behave in a certain way does not make that behavior desirable.

Second, the quantitative dimensions of tests may obscure the many opportunities for subjectivity and human judgment in their development and administration. No test is sufficiently valid to be the sole measure for important decisions.

Third, even when tests are reliable, testers may not be. Tests can be used inappropriately, administered carelessly, or the results simply ignored.

Leithwood and colleagues present several guidelines to improve the use of leadership assessment in schools:

- The first priority is careful preparation. Schools should specify their testing policies and procedures, stating clearly why they are testing and what they hope to learn. While results may sometimes be used to help make personnel decisions, the major goal of measuring leadership should be professional growth and improvement.
- Those responsible for selecting or evaluating leaders should be well trained in assessment procedures.
- Schools can improve credibility of their assessment process by using multiple data sources rather than any single technique. Formal instruments may be most useful as an early screening tool.
- Leadership assessment should not be left to single individuals. Panels involving people with different roles will ensure fairness as well as the perception of fairness. Leaders should be involved with their assessment, and should receive feedback that allows them to develop plans for future growth.

The authors acknowledge that their recommendations are ambitious, and may best be viewed as worthwhile directions for the future rather than as reforms to be achieved overnight. But they argue that the stakes are too high to ignore these issues.

Santeusanio, Richard P. **"Using Multi-Raters in Superintendent Evaluation."** *The School Administrator* 54:3 (March 1997): 12. *Available from:* American Association of School Administrators Distribution Center, P.O. Box 411, Annapolis Jct., MD 20701-0411. 888-782-2272.

One of the newer approaches to leadership assessment is "360-degree feedback," which relies on ratings from multiple sources. Typically, a leader's performance and characteristics will be assessed by subordinates, peers, and superiors.

Superintendent Richard Santeusanio succinctly describes the five-step process used in his Danvers, Massachusetts, school district for administrators and teachers. The first step is to identify the competencies related to the job and format them into a survey. The second step is to select the evaluation team. For Santeusanio's own assessment, the team consisted of 21 people, including board members, principals, curriculum specialists, teachers, and parents. Teams with somewhat different makeup might be used to assess other administrators.

The third and fourth steps are to conduct and score the survey. The final—and most important—step is to develop an action plan based on the strengths and weaknesses identified by the survey. Santeusanio reports that he and others in the district have found this collective feedback to be more valid and meaningful than other methods. It has led not only to a clearer under-

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standing of performance standards, but has fostered change for professional improvement.

He notes that 360-degree feedback solves some problems common with single-source evaluations, including lack of fairness, accuracy, credibility, and usefulness to the person being evaluated. His district has found it to be both balanced and time-efficient.

Freeman, Frank H.; Knott, Katherine B.; and Schwartz, Mary K. **Leadership Education: A Source Book, 1996-1997**. Sixth Edition, Volume 2. Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership, 1996. 352 pages. *Available from:* Center for Creative Leadership, One Leadership Place, P.O. Box 26300, Greensboro, NC 27438-6300. 910-288-7210. $35.00 plus $4.00 shipping and handling. [Also available: Volume 1, 457 pages, $35.00; both volumes, $60.00.]

Finding an appropriate leadership instrument is a potentially time-consuming task, traditionally requiring a hit-or-miss search through many sources. In recent years, however, a number of groups and publications have begun making this information more easily accessible.

The Center for Creative Leadership's Source Book includes a section with brief descriptions of 73 commonly used leadership tests, including target audiences, administration procedures, and comments on their validity and reliability. Vendor addresses are provided.

Another source is the test-locator website maintained by the **ERIC Clearinghouse for Assessment and Evaluation** (http://ericae.net). The database provides quick access to information on more than 10,000 instruments of various types. For each test there is a brief descriptive abstract and the publisher's address. In addition, the site can point the searcher to published reviews of some tests, and it also has a section providing guidelines for choosing instruments.

Later this year, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management will publish a book on measuring leadership that will be aimed at meeting the specific needs of school leaders.

Research Roundup is published three times during the school year by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Single copies: $2.50; bulk orders (10 or more): $2.00 ea. Virginia residents add 4.5% sales tax. Specify date and title of issue when ordering. Checks payable to NAESP must accompany order. Send to Educational Products, NAESP, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3483.

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